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SUBJECT: H1N1 IN LEBANON DECLARED AN EPIDEMIC (ECONOMIC WEEK IN REVIEW, NOVEMBER 23 - 25, 2009)

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H1N1 DECLARED EPIDEMIC

[1](#)1. (U) Minister of Public Health Mohammad Khalifeh announced November 25 that Lebanon had moved to the epidemic stage of H1N1, as test results showed that 80% of people with the flu were carrying the H1N1 strain. However, he reiterated that the virus was not fatal, noting that most patients were being treated at home and that only two deaths thus far had been attributed to the virus. The ministry will provide the anti-viral drug Tamiflu to all government hospitals to distribute to children for free, Khalifeh said. Although the Ministry of Public Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, decided not to postpone the 2009-2010 school year for private and public schools because of the virus, several private schools have unilaterally closed for up to one week, given cases of swine flu.

JUSTICE MINISTER BACKS
MODERNIZING COMMERCIAL LAWS

[1](#)2. (U) Minister of Justice Ibrahim Najjar called for the need to modernize commercial laws -- some of which date back to the 1920s -- and better implement legislation in general, during the opening of a one-day conference organized by the Arab Center for the Development of the Rule of Law and Integrity (ACRLI). Najjar said new business laws needed to consider e-commerce and noted that the ministry already had considered 75 laws for reform and improvement.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Meanwhile, Minister of Economy and Trade Mohammad Safadi stressed the importance of modernizing laws as a means of encouraging investments and increasing productivity and exports, thereby raising job opportunities and per capita income. Safadi noted that many new commercial and economic laws were previously drafted and are still pending parliamentary passage. (Note: New draft laws and amendments directly related to Lebanon's accession to the WTO are currently pending parliamentary ratification, some for more than two years. End note.)

HIGHER COUNCIL FOR
CHILDHOOD LAUNCHES WEBSITE

[1](#)4. (U) The Ministry of Social Affairs' Higher Council for Childhood (HCC) launched its new website, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The trilingual

website, Atfalouna ('our kids') (<http://www.atfalouna.gov.lb>) features information for children, parents, and professionals, UN documentation, HCC publications, an e-library, and a list of child-related NGOs. A study on the situation of children and women by the HCC in collaboration with UNICEF is expected to be placed on the site in early 2010. Some of the most important issues facing children in Lebanon include poverty, school dropouts, physical punishment and child labor, but detailed documentation and accurate statistics are not readily available.

SECOND MOST ECONOMICALLY
FREE COUNTRY IN REGION

15. (U) Lebanon ranked 2nd out of 15 countries in the Fraser Institute's annual 2009 Index of Economic Freedom in the Arab World, up from 5th in 2008. Lebanon ranked first regionally in terms of government size (small relative to its economy) and access to available liquidity and stable currency, and second in terms of regulation of credit, labor, and business. Lebanon lagged in the categories of freedom to trade internationally, legal structure, and security of property rights.

DAUGHTON